

Press release – October 2025

“Back the Biosphere” - Railfuture’s Devon & Cornwall regional branch supports new 10-year Strategy for North Devon UNESCO Biosphere

Responding to the Biosphere’s recent public consultation Railfuture, which is a founder member of the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, has advocated an ambition for an increase in the mode share of visitors to the North Devon Biosphere by sustainable transport (active travel and public transport).



Railfuture applauds the consultation Preamble’s declaration that the “consultation draft ... is deliberately aspirational to set the high ambitions of the Partnership reflecting the sustainable development needs in the area.” Railfuture appreciates that “Sustainable economic development and green business growth” is part of the Biosphere Partnership’s statement of “What We Do” and has welcomed the reference to ‘Green and Sustainable Tourism’ as part of “Unlocking the local value of our nature” – one of four Biosphere targets.

Devon & Cornwall regional branch chair, Barnstaple born and bred Tim Steer commented: “We believe that our active support for the current feasibility and viability assessments of modernising the North Devon Line and its services, with half-hourly trains taking much less time to get from end to end, and extending them from Barnstaple to Bideford, are both schemes which align with the vision and mission of the North Devon Biosphere and the targets which it is setting itself.”

Acting Convener for the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance Roger Blake, Railfuture’s national Infrastructure & Networks Director, added “Improved and extended mainline rail services will add sustainable transport capacity, choice and connectivity to an area reeling under the growing pressures of congestion, car-dependency and carbon emissions. Our work has secured the official backing of Peninsula Transport in its Strategic Implementation Plan’s Delivery Plan for 2025-50 and of the Devon & Torbay Combined County Authority’s Local Transport Plan for 2025-40. A recent Network Rail assessment of prospects for new stations across the whole of its Western Route explored Bideford – ranked 20th among the hundreds of eligible population clusters nationwide – as one of its five case studies, with encouragingly favourable conclusions in ranking it 5th-best overall of the 23 studied, including 2nd-best for ‘strategic fit.’ In addition, a recent independent economic appraisal which Railfuture commissioned on behalf of the Alliance suggested that under certain circumstances a Bideford station in 2040 could rank among the top 20% of British stations, being as busy as Weston-super-Mare in 2023/24. We therefore look forward to a long-term collaboration with the North Devon Biosphere as each party develops its schemes centred on natural and community sustainability over the coming decade.”

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